



College Student Commission

Recommendation (20220408-3a): Remote Higher Education Access

Authored by: Esther Heymans (St. Edward's University) & Lira Amari Ramirez (University of Texas at Austin)

WHEREAS, the College Student Commission recognizes that students with disabilities have historically been excluded from higher education, both through explicit means and implicit bias. The Commission further acknowledges that this historical exclusion has current ramifications.

WHEREAS, disability services and accommodations are necessary to counter historical discrimination and provide equal access and rights to disabled students.

WHEREAS, about 5% of students enrolled at UT Austin in the 2020-2021 school year were registered with UT's disability services office.¹ ² About 10% of the St. Edward's University Student body used St. Edward's Student Disability Services in Spring of 2021.³ About 7% of ACC students are registered with Student Accessibility Services each semester.⁴ About 9% of Concordia students currently use accommodations.⁵ ⁶

WHEREAS, after the United States declared COVID-19 a national emergency, remote learning rapidly grew as a way to accommodate the need for students to shelter in place.

¹ "SSD Data." Services for Students with Disabilities. University of Texas at Austin, 2021. <https://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/ssd-statistics/>.

² "Interactive Common Data Set." Institutional Reporting, Research, and Information Systems. University of Texas at Austin. February 2, 2022. <https://www.utexas.edu/about/facts-and-figures>

³ Vasquez, Candice. "Accommodating Students with Disabilities at St. Edward's University." Student Accessibility Services, St. Edward's University, July 30, 2021. https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/10x5NxQ4Y60CiDaYEHIRG_leSmlfBXtRy/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=111953376538798849781&rtpof=true&sd=true

⁴ Student Accessibility Services. "SAS Statistics." Austin Community College. Email. March 3, 2022.

⁵ "Fast Facts." Concordia University Texas. <https://www.concordia.edu/about/fast-facts.html>

⁶ Cooper, Ruth. "Statistics Request - Services for Students with Disabilities." Academic Support Center. Concordia University Texas. Email. April 6, 2022.

WHEREAS, as the pandemic has continued, Austin-area higher education institutions have begun to offer increasingly fewer online classes, despite fluctuations in Austin's COVID transmission rates and risk based staging guidelines.^{7 8}

WHEREAS, Austin's colleges and universities have not instituted adequate safety precautions to protect all and especially high-risk students from infection, while mandating in-person attendance.

WHEREAS, remote access offers students the ability to attend classes from any location, providing students with access concerns an equitable and safe learning environment, and therefore serves as an invaluable resource for students with disabilities.

WHEREAS, diminishing options to access classwork remotely uniquely affects immunocompromised, high-risk, and disabled students, furthering historic exclusion and inaccessibility for disabled college students.

WHEREAS, all colleges represented by the College Student Commission are required to provide accommodations to students with disabilities to ensure equal access under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Every student has the right to an accessible and equitable education.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the College Student Commission asks the Austin City Council to declare remote access to higher education classes to be a reasonable and necessary accommodation to provide students access to higher education institutions.

RESOLVED that the commission asks Austin Community College, Concordia University, Huston-Tillotson University, St. Edward's University, and the University of Texas at Austin to continue offering at least 15% of courses online across disciplines, regardless of COVID-19 transmission levels, or publicize remote access as an available accommodation.

RESOLVED, that compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act is not enough to ensure an accessible and equitable education for all students. The aforementioned institutions must provide greater funding to campus disability services to ensure student accommodations and accessibility rights are met, including remote access.

⁷ Austin Community College Fact Book 2020-2021. Office of Institutional Research and Analysis. Austin Community College. 2021. pg. 221, 234, 234, 248.

<https://www.austincc.edu/oira/pubs/factbook/2020-21/PDFs/2020-2021-ACC-FACT-BOOK.pdf>

⁸ Office of the Registrar, University of Texas at Austin, March 22 2022.

Date of Approval: April 9, 2022

Record of the vote: 8-0-0

Attest: *Lira Amari Ramirez*

Lira Amari Ramírez

Chair, College Student Commission